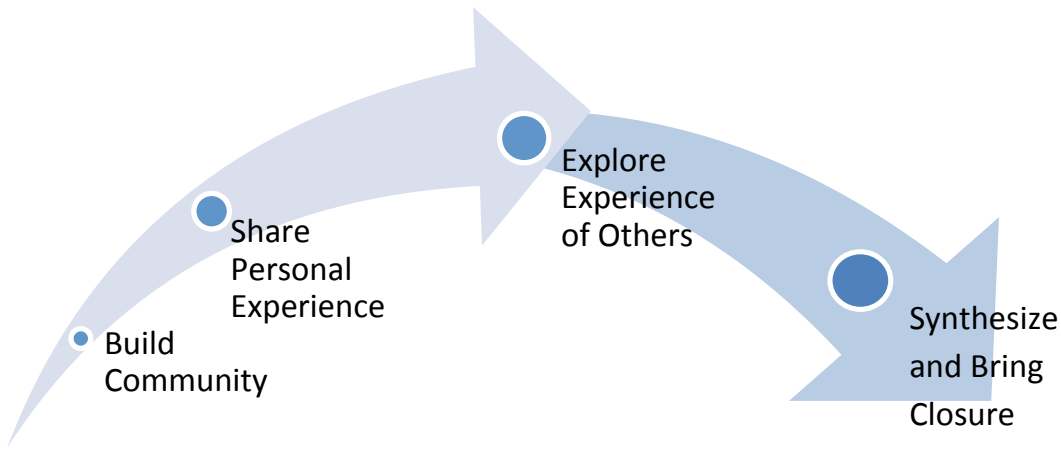


The Arc of Dialogue

(Adapted from International Coalition Sites of Conscience and The Tenement Museum materials)



Phase 1: Building Community

Phase One allows participants to join the group through making a contribution to the dialogue, breaking down barriers between people by asking non-threatening questions that allow participants to share information about themselves and to start to learn about the others in the group.

Key criteria:

- Build safety and the “container” for dialogue by establishing the group’s agreements, principles or guidelines using the question, *“What do we need from each other to engage in dialogue?”*
- Be sure to explain the purpose or intention of the dialogue: How do we hope to learn from one another? What is unique about dialogue? (*In dialogue, we share experiences and knowledge so we can learn from one another; we identify and explore our own assumptions so we learn about ourselves, as well.*)
- Everyone must be able to respond to the opening question. All voices should “enter the room” during this community-building time.
- This process should feel welcoming and non-threatening.

Sample questions:

- When people ask you where you’re from, what do you tell them and why do you respond this way?
- Choose five words that you would use to describe yourself.
- Do you ever choose to withhold any of these identities when interacting with people you don’t know? Why or why not?

Phase 2: Sharing Our Experiences

Phase Two invites participants to think about their own experiences related to the topic, share these experiences with the dialogue group, and begin to make personal connections to the topic. The facilitator helps participants recognize how their experiences are alike and different and why.

Key criteria:

- Questions should be open-ended and welcome each person's experience equally.
- Questions should place minimal value judgment on responses. There should be no implied hierarchy of preferred responses.
- Questions should welcome and encourage the group to share its differing experiences, not just its similar experiences.

Sample Questions:

Topic: Immigration

- What impact does immigration have on your daily life?
- What images come to your mind when you hear the word "immigrant?" How, if at all, do these images affect the way you interact with immigrant people in your community?
- What do you value most about being a citizen of the US?

Topic: Civil Rights

- Describe a situation where you witnessed someone being treated unfairly, how did it make you feel? What did you do?

Topic: Climate Change

- Who or what in your life first shaped your relationship to the natural environment?
- What do you most value about the natural environment? How did you come to feel that way?

Follow-up questions for any topic:

- How did you first come to understand this issue? When did you first encounter this issue? Can you remember the first time you learned about...? What does this issue mean to you? What does this term or word mean to you?
- What differences do you notice in the ways you've experienced this topic? How was your personal experience different from others you heard in the group? Did you hear any similarities? To what do you attribute the similarities in experience?

Phase 3: Exploring Beyond Our Own Experience

In Phase Three, questions are specifically designed to explore the dialogue topic beyond participants' personal experience with it. These questions help participants engage in inquiry and exploration about the dialogue topic *in an effort to learn with and from one another*.

Key criteria:

- Questions must be framed in a spirit of inquiry – reject binary questions that elicit a simple yes or no.
- Ask probing questions that help people surface their assumptions...why do they think and feel as they do? Move beyond mere opinion into a deeper understanding of why we perceive something the way we do.
- Probe the underlying social conditions that inform our diversity of perspectives
- Ask questions that allow participants to own and explore the roots of their perspective

Sample Questions:

Topic: Immigration

- Have you noticed an influx of new immigrants into your community? If so, how do you think your community is responding to these newcomers? Why do you think this is happening?
- Who should be welcome to immigrate to the US today? Who should not be welcome to immigrate here? What values inform your response to these questions?
- How should our nation decide who is able to immigrate to the US and who is unable to do so?
- What are the values that should drive our immigration policy?

Topic: Civil Rights

- What impact does your racial, ethnic or cultural identity have on you perspectives on civil rights?
- How would you feel if you were excluded/left out based on your appearance?

Topic: Climate Change

- What troubles you most about our collective relationship to the natural environment? What is most reassuring?

Follow up for any topic:

- Why do you think our interpretations of this topic are so different? What are the differences you notice?
- How did you come to think this way? What are the assumptions you make when you respond to this topic? How did your assumptions develop?
- Do you think these differences in experience and perspectives occur in other groups or communities? What might be the source or cause of these differences? Are there larger social realities that shape these differences? What are they?

Phase 4: Synthesizing and Bringing Closure to the Dialogue

During Phase Four, the facilitator helps the participants synthesize what they've experienced by identifying and make meaning from the "threads" that connect the ideas, perspectives and insights generated through the dialogue. In the process of closure, the facilitator works with the group to reflect on its learning, offer final observations, make comments to one another about the learning process.

Key criteria:

- Questions should help participants make meaning and draw new insights from the *diversity* of experiences and perspectives that they've shared.
 - *Was there any one person whose comments particularly affected you? Are there things you heard today that you want to understand better? What, if any, new insights do you take from this dialogue? How are you thinking about this topic now? What have you heard that inspired you to learn more or act more on this issue?*
- Questions should help participants make meaning, draw new insights, identify *common threads* that link their perspectives, identify possible *reasons for differences* in perspective.
 - *What did you hear today that challenged your assumptions? Did you hear anything that supported or justified your assumptions? Was there any one person whose comments particularly affected you? How, if at all, are you thinking differently about this issue?*
- Questions should help participants reflect on what they've learned about themselves, one another and the topic at hand.
 - *What, if anything, did you learn about yourself in relation to this issue? How do you want to use this new self-knowledge when you leave here? How have your views on this topic been informed by the rest of this group? What new insights do you take away?*
- Questions should allow participants, as they wish, to share the impact of the group leaning experience on them personally.
 - *If you could sum up your experience in this dialogue in one word or phrase, what would it be? As you leave today, what is the primary thought you have about this topic? Is there anyone in the group you want to acknowledge or thank in particular for his or her contributions to the group?*

Sample Questions:

For Synthesis

- What, if anything, did you hear in this conversation that challenged your assumptions? What, if anything, did you hear that confirmed your assumptions? Tell us about how your assumptions were challenged.
- What, if any, new information did you learn? How will you use this new knowledge?
- What impact, if any, will this dialogue experience have on the way you perceive or interact with immigrant people from any nation?

For Closure

- What is one idea or insight that you will take away from today's experiences?
- If you could continue to replicate this conversation with anyone in your life, who would that be?
- What can you do when you know someone is being treated unfairly?

Crafting a Good Question

(Adapted from conversationcafe.org)

What makes a question good for dialogue? One that is:

- **Inviting.** It involves both the head and heart. People can respond with their feelings and their thoughts.
- **Honest.** It has not already been answered conclusively. The only “right” answer can be generated from the personal experience of each participant.
- **Non-judgmental:** There are no embedded cultural, political, or ideological assumptions.
- **Experiential.** If they choose, people can tell a story or recall an experience that relates to the question.
- **Inclusive.** Anyone at the table could have something valuable to say—whatever their age, race, gender, or level of education may be.
- **Generative.** Can’t be answered with a “yes” or “no”, or a platitude. Generate robust discussion or examples.

Fact- Based Questions vs. Open-Ended Questions

FACT - What kind of assistance do you think was available during the Great Depression?

OPEN - Where would you turn for assistance during difficult economic times?

FACT - What do you think the average rent for a public housing unit in Chicago is?

OPEN - What would you be willing to spend for an apartment in center city Chicago?

FACT - Where do you think Bob Schneider got the money to open his general store?

OPEN - If you were starting a business, where might you get the money?